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ABSTRACT

This journal issue presents examples of progress in urban education. It shows preliminary data on system-wide improvement in student achievement, dropout and graduation rates, student attendance, and more. Progress in urban schools is the result of a growing national consensus on what needs to be done, and an increasing emphasis by urban educators on high expectations for students, teacher training and development, promoting accountability, finding social and economic resources, and other components of educational quality. The examples that are given, which do not include all the improvements occurring in all the members of the Council of the Great City Schools, show signs of substantive system-wide progress in: (1) achievement test results; (2) reduced dropout rates (many now in single digits); (3) narrower gaps between students of color and their white counterparts; (4) higher college entrance examination scores with more students taking them; and (5) better average daily attendance. Examples are given from 41 urban school systems. (SLD)

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Signs of Progress:

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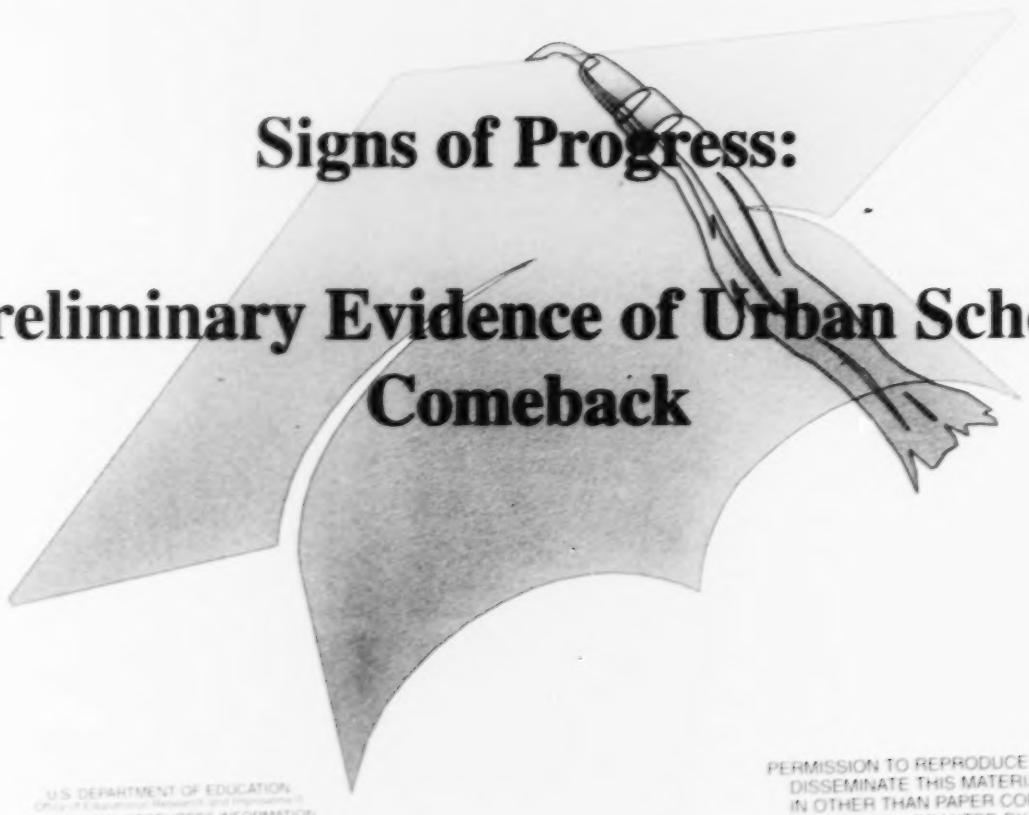

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urban Indicator

The Research Department of the Council of the Great City Schools publishes the *Urban Indicator*, which explores timely and pertinent issues facing urban education.

Newsletter Staff:

Michael Casserly
Executive Director

Sharon Lewis
Director of Research

Adriane Williams
Research Specialist

Urban Indicator
Council of the Great City Schools
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Suite 702
Washington, D.C. 20004

(202) 393-2427
(202) 393-2400 (fax)
http://www.cgcs.org
Editor's E-mail:
slewis@cgcs.org

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Signs of Progress:
Preliminary Evidence of Urban School Comeback

This document presents examples of progress in urban education. It shows preliminary data on system-wide improvement in student achievement, dropout and graduation rates, student attendance and more. Progress in urban schools is the result of a growing national consensus on what needs to be done and an increasing emphasis by urban educators on:

- ✓ establishing high expectations for all students,
- ✓ providing well trained teachers and staff,
- ✓ providing schools with the tools and programs they need to increase achievement,
- ✓ strengthening school system leadership, management and administration,
- ✓ designing assessment systems that hold everyone accountable for results,
- ✓ seeking adequate resources and ensuring that they are used effectively,
- ✓ building public support for the education of urban children, and
- ✓ linking schools and students with community supports and social services children need to succeed.

These data are preliminary and illustrative. They do not include all improvements occurring in each Great City School system. And they do not include all cities. The examples do highlight, however, substantive signs of system-wide, rather than school-by-school, progress featuring:

- ☛ continuous progress on state and local achievement tests – often at rates faster than state and national averages,
- ☛ significantly reduced annual dropout rates – many now in single digits,
- ☛ narrower gaps among students of color and their white counterparts,
- ☛ higher college entrance examination scores with more students taking them, and
- ☛ better K-12 average daily attendance, now exceeding 95%.

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Atlanta

- For 1996-97, 49% percent of students in grades 1-10 scored at or above the national norm in mathematics on the *Iowa Tests of Basic Skills/Tests of Achievement and Proficiency*, up two percentage points from the previous year.
- Eighty-two percent (82%) of the grade eleven students passed the state examination in writing on the first attempt. This represents an eight-percentage point increase over 1995-96.
- There was a 4-percent increase in the number of students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses from 1995-96 to 1996-97.

Baltimore

- The average daily attendance in grades 1-6 increased from 90.4% in 1989-90 to 93.3% in 1996-97, grades 7-12 increased from 79.4% to 81.5%.
- The annual dropout rate decreased from 18.8% in 1989-90 to 13.5% in 1996-97

Birmingham

- The number of dropouts decreased from 1,114 in 1995-96 to 806 in 1996-97.
- The average daily attendance increased from 90.7% in 1995-96 to 91.2% in 1996-97.

Boston

- The dropout rate for the 1996-97 school year is down 50% to 8.6% from 17% in 1984-85.
- The student attendance rate for 1996-97 was 90% for grades 1-12, up from 88.1% in 1992-93.

Broward County

- The percent of students enrolling in Advanced Placement (AP) courses is outpacing the growth in student enrollment. Broward's high school enrollment for the 1996-97 school year represented a 12% percent increase over the 1995-96 school year. For the 1996-97 school year, fifteen (15) percent more students were enrolled in AP courses.
- For three consecutive years Broward's annual dropout rate has been lower than the state dropout rate. For 1994-95, the state's dropout rate was 5.2% compared to 3.4% for Broward; in 1995-96, 5.0% for the state and 3.2% for Broward; and in 1996-97, 5.4% for the state and 3.2% for Broward.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg

- Approximately 10% of the elementary and middle schools met the "exemplary" status for the first year of the state's new accountability program.
- Thirty-five percent of the high school students completed at least one Advanced Placement course in 1996-97.

Chicago

- The percent of students meeting the district's promotion criteria increased significantly between the end of school year and the end of summer. The percent of students meeting the established criteria in Grade 3 increased from 68% to 82%; Grade 6 from 69% to 85% and Grade 8 from 79% to 92%.
- The Illinois State Board of Education released information showing that for 1996-97 Chicago Public Schools are improving on state criteria at a faster rate than the state as a whole. State schools improved by only 19 percent while Chicago Public Schools showed a 37 percent improvement rate.

- More than one-third of Chicago schools that were on the state's "watch list" in 1994-95 were removed in 1996-97.

Columbus

- For the second straight year, Columbus Public Schools have shown an increase in student enrollment reversing a 25-year decline. In 1995-96 district enrollment was 62,812; in 1997-98 64,248.

- From 1994-95 to 1996-97 the percent of students passing the writing portion of the *Ohio Ninth-Grade Proficiency Test* increased from 65 to 77; reading from 68 to 78, mathematics from 34 to 41; and citizenship from 60 to 63.

Dayton

- Dayton's ninth graders' scores in reading, science, mathematics, and citizenship have improved dramatically since 1990. That year, 57% of Dayton's ninth graders passed the reading portion of the *Ohio Ninth Grade Proficiency Test.* In 1997, 75% gained proficiency in reading, matching the state's standard. Students attaining proficiency increased from 54% to 70% in writing; 16% to 35% in mathematics; and 24% to 55% in citizenship.

- Annual dropout rate for students in grades 9-12 declined from 7% in 1994-95 to a record low of 5.7% in 1995-96.

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- The average daily attendance for grades K-5 increased from 88% in 1993-94 to 91% in 1994-95; grades 6-8 from 84% to 86%; and grades 9-12 from 73% to 77%.

Denver

- Student test scores for the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills* are up for every grade except grade seven, which remained the same. For 1996-97, average percentile for grade 2 students in reading was 48 up from 32 for 1994-95; grade 8 mathematics 46 up from 36; and grade 11 written expression 54 up from 49.

- The annual high school dropout rate is 6.5%, which is significantly lower than the 1992-93 statistic of 10.3%.

- The annual dropout rate for Hispanic students decreased substantially in 1996-97 to 8.5% from 12.9% in 1992-93.

Detroit

- Grades 4 and 7 state test score data from 1991-92 through 1996-97 show that there have been increases in reading and mathematics. The percent of students with satisfactory performance in reading has increased from 19 to 39. The percent of students with satisfactory performance in mathematics has increased from 13 to 40.

- The percent of Grade 5 and Grade 8 students attaining proficient scores on the state science and writing tests has increased substantially from 1995-96, the first year of test administration. The percent of grade 5 students proficient in science increased from 18.3 to 31.0 in 1996-97. In writing, the percent proficient increased from 27.3 to 55.5 at Grade 5 and from 39.6 to 59.7 at Grade 8.

- Data from the *Metropolitan Achievement Tests* show a steady increase in the percent of students scoring at or above the 50th percentile. For 1995-96,

32 percent of students in Grades 1-10 were at or above the national norm compared to 34% in reading and mathematics in 1996-97; 27% compared to 31% in science.

El Paso

- For the 1995-96 school year, the annual dropout rate was at an all-time low of 0.8%.
- The student attendance rate for the district has remained at or above 95% since 1994.
- Since 1994, the percent of students in Grades 3-8 and 10 passing the *Texas Assessment of Academic Skills* increased from 70.9% to 79.9% in reading, from 74.6% to 80.4% in writing, and from 57.5% to 73.3% in mathematics.
- Five year trend data for the *SAT* show a 6 point gain on the verbal portion of the test in 1996-97 to 471 and a four point gain in mathematics to 479.

Fresno

- *SAT* scores for the 1997 class revealed an 16 point increase on the verbal portion of the test to 472 and 14 points on mathematics to 496 when compared to 1991-92.
- The annual dropout rate declined from 11.4% in 1991-92 to 6.4% in 1996-97.

Houston

- For 1996-97, the *SAT* composite scores for Houston students are increasing at a faster pace than students throughout the state and nation. The verbal portion of the *SAT* increased by one point to 466, and the math scores rose four points to 472. But statewide results showed a one-point decline on verbal scores and an increase of only one point in math. Across the nation, verbal scores remained the same in 1996-97 and math scores rose three points.
- The annual dropout rate declined from 10.4% in 1989-90 to 4.2% in 1995-96.

Jefferson County

- The percent of elementary students in low-level reading (novice category) decreased from 26% in 1992-93 to 5% in 1996-97.
- For 1996-97, 96% of graduating seniors made a successful transition to college, employment, military or career and technical training.

Long Beach

- The number of elementary, middle and high school suspensions dropped from 7,775 in 1992-93 to 6,697 in 1996-97.
- The average daily attendance rate for elementary schools increased from 93.7% in 1994-95 to 94.7% in 1995-96; 93.3% to 94.6% in middle school grades and 90.8% to 93.3% at the high school level.
- The annual dropout rate for students in grades 9-12 has decreased from 10.4% in 1991-92 to 7.8% in 1996-97.
- The percent of high school graduates matriculating to college exceeds 70%.
- The number of students scoring at or above the national averages on the *SAT* increased from 487 in 1993-94 to 546 in 1995-96.

Los Angeles

- For the 1995-96 school year, the annual dropout rate was 8.8 percent, down nearly 17 percent from the previous year.

- The four year dropout rate decreased to 9.2%, nearly 49 percent, since 1985 when the rate was 18.1%.

- The number of Los Angeles Unified School District high school students taking advanced placement examinations for college credit increased by more than 11 percent for the 1996-97 school year when compared to 1995-96. Some 14,867 students took the examinations in 1995-96 compared to 16,506 in 1996-97 and 5,590 in 1985-86.

- LAUSD students continue to outpace the rest of the nation by a substantial margin in the number of AP exams taken per 1,000 high school juniors

and seniors enrolled. LAUSD is also far ahead of other districts around the nation in the number of AP exams reaching a score of three or higher per 1,000 juniors and seniors.

Memphis

- From 1994-95 to 1996-97 the percent of grade 4 students with a three or higher (on a six point scale) on the state's writing assessment increased from 48% to 76%, 8th graders 61% to 76% and 11th graders from 53% to 83%.

- Average *SAT* verbal scores increased from a scale score of 550 in 1995-96 to 560 in 1996-97; mathematics scores rose from 527 to 549.

- More than 75% of students in grades 4, 8 and 11 earned scores of proficient or higher on the state writing test.

- The annual dropout rate declined 3.3 percent from 1995-96 to 1996-97.

Miami-Dade

- For the first two grading periods during the 1997-98 school year the average K-12 attendance is 94.3 up from 93.2 a year ago.

- Enrollment in advanced courses in science and mathematics increased more than 89% from 1989-90 to 1996-97.

- The number of advanced placement examinations taken by students increased by more than 6% from 1994-95 to 1996-97, while the percent of student earning possible college credit through advanced placement examinations during that period rose from 42.9% to 45.7%.

Milwaukee

- Only 21% of the juniors passed the first administration of the state mathematics tests; an overwhelming 98% of seniors passed by the end of the summer program in 1996-97.

Minneapolis

- Student scores on the state's reading test increased from 67th percentile in grade 2 to the 81st percentile in grade 7 on the *California Achievement Test*.

- The number of high school graduates increased from 1680 (78%) in 1995-96 to 1822 (80%) in 1996-97.

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- The annual dropout rate decreased from 11.1% in 1995-96 to 10.5% in 1996-97.

New Orleans

- The graduation rate has increased from 81.6% in 1992-93 to 84.5% in 1996-97.

- The percent of students taking the *ACT* in 1996-97 increased by 17% compared to 1992-93; the percent of students taking the *SAT* increased 117% from 1994-95 to 1996-97.

New York City

- Results of state tests show that NYC elementary and middle school students outpaced their counterparts statewide. Grade 3 reading scores increased from 64.1% in 1995-96 to 69.4% in 1996-97; grade 6 student scores rose from 66.6% to 68.4%. For both grades, the rate of growth exceeded that of the state.

- The percent of NYC students enrolled in Limited English Proficient programs and who attained English proficiency increased for all school levels in 1996-97. At the elementary school level 24.1% achieved fluency in English, compared to 23.1% in 1996; 14.1% at the middle school level compared to 10.7% in 1995-96; and 13.8% at the high school level compared to 13.0% for 1995-96.

- A full 92.2% of third-graders met or surpassed the state standard for achievement in 1996-97, up from 91.0% in 1995-96.

- The four year dropout rate for NYC high schools is at its lowest since 1986. In 1994-95, the dropout rate was 18.1%; 1995-96 it was 16.4%; and 15.9% in 1996-97.

Newark

- On the state administered *Early Warning Test*, grade 8 student mathematics scores improved by nearly six percentage points – from 46.8% in 1995-96 to 52.4% in 1996-97.

- The student attendance rate for 1996-97 was 90.2% an improvement of 1.2% over the previous year and the highest for a five year period. Only three times during the past 25 years was the attendance rate higher than 90.2%.

Norfolk

- The pass rate for grade 6 students on the reading, writing, and mathematics portion of the *Virginia Literacy Testing Program* increased by 8.2, 6.6 and 10 percentage points respectively from 1994-95 to 1996-97.

Oakland

- The number of high school students taking both the *SAT* and *ACT* has increased from 958 in 1992-93 to 1,073 in 1996-97, a 12% increase.

- For 1996-97, the college attendance rate of Oakland seniors is 67.2% surpassing the state average by 15.7 percentage points.

Oklahoma City

- The number of schools classified as low performing decreased from 11 in 1988-89 to 2 in 1996-97 and high challenged schools decreased from 7 to 0.

Omaha

- Omaha's graduating seniors outscored most other Council districts and many of the nation's public school students in 1996-97 on the *ACT*. Average *ACT* scores for Omaha students was 21.0, national average 21.0, Council average 18.7.

Philadelphia

- For 1996-97, students showed overall improvement in achievement on the *Stanford Achievement Tests* across all grades and subjects, with a five percentage point gain in the proportion of students scoring at the basic level and above, except for 8th and 11th grade mathematics with 3.1 and 2.7 point increases, respectively and 11th grade science with a 3.5 point increase compared to the 1995-96 school year.

- For 1996-97, ninety-two (92) schools had more than a five-point gain at the basic level or above on the *Stanford Achievement Tests*; over one-half of those had more than a 10-point gain.

Pittsburgh

- Pittsburgh's seniors outpaced most of the nation and all other Council districts in 1996-97 on the *ACT*. Average *ACT* scores for Pittsburgh was 22.2, national average 21.0, Council average 18.7.

Portland

- Graduating seniors from Portland Public Schools earned an *ACT* composite score of 22.0, scoring at or above the national average.

- Five-year trend data for the *SAT* show significant gains by Portland's students. Scores increased from 501 in 1992-93 to 517 in 1995-96 on the verbal portion of the *SAT* and from 504 in 1992-93 to 525 in 1997.

Providence

- The 1996-97 graduation rate increased 57% since 1989-90 while the four-year dropout rate has decreased from 51% in 1986-87 to 21% in 1996-97.

- The percentage of students taking the *SAT* has increased to 72% while student enrollment increased 27% for the same period.

- Five-year trend data show a five-point increase in *SAT* scores on both the verbal and mathematics portions. In 1992-93 average scores were 426 for mathematics and 423 for verbal compared to 1996-97 scores of 431 mathematics and 428 verbal.

Rochester

- Since 1996, the percent of students meeting or exceeding the standard on state tests increased from: 70% to 75% in reading, 83% to 88% in writing; 86% to 90 % in mathematics.

- For 1996-97, the number of students dropping out of school decreased from 650 to 575 since 1994-95.

- For 1996-97, the percent of students who passed the Regents examinations or higher level courses increased from 27% to 39% since the 1994-95 school year.
- The number of minority students enrolled in the *Major Achievement Program* for gifted children increased by 35% since 1996.

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Saint Paul

- Saint Paul students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch and who stay in the same school for three or more years do better on standardized tests than their counterparts who change schools more frequently. For students remaining in the same schools, 14% fewer Asian American students scored "below average", African American 4.5%, Hispanic 5.0%, American Indian 7.0% and white students 2.0%.

Sacramento

- For the first administration of the *Terra Nova* in 1997-98, 44% of the grade 10 students scored at or above the national norm in reading and 47% in mathematics.
- For the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years the dropout rate has been between 6 and 7 percent, down from a high of 12 percent.

San Antonio

- For 1996-97, the percent of students mastering the state tests increased when compared to the last three years by 10% in reading to 65.9; by 23% in mathematics to 58.2%; and by 11% in writing to 72.3%.
- The percent of grade 10 students mastering the exit-level state test has gone up 7% in reading to 72%, 4% in writing to 75%, and 6% in mathematics to 48% when compared to one year ago.
- The number of schools ranked "low-performing" by the state has decreased from 42 in 1992-93 to six in 1996-97.
- The annual dropout rate for secondary school students has decreased over the past several years and is down to 2.9% for 1995-96.

San Diego

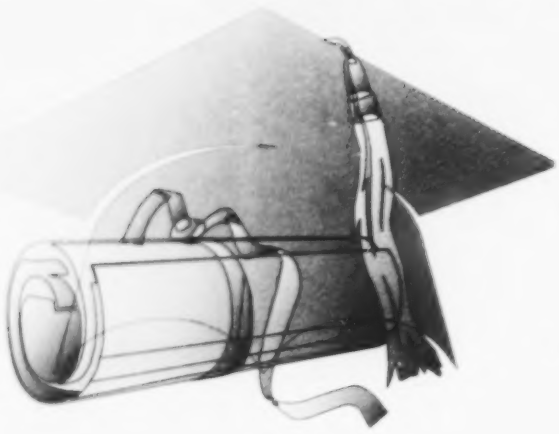
- For 1996-97, the annual dropout rate for students in grades 9 –12 is at an all time low at 3.0% compared to 7.7% for 1989-90; for grades 7-12 the 1996-97 dropout rate is 2.3%.
- San Diego seniors scored significantly higher on the *SAT* in 1996-97, increasing their average combined score to 987 up nine points from the previous year.
- More that 48% of the students eligible to take the *SAT* took the examination compared to 42% nationally.

San Francisco

- Comparing 1995-96 to 1996-97 scores on the *Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills*, San Francisco first graders jumped from 39.2 to 49.2 points in reading and 46.3 to 55 points in mathematics.
- The student suspension rate has declined in the last five years, going from 3.5% of the total enrollment in 1991-92 to 3.0% in 1996-97.
- The district's annual dropout rate has declined from 3.5% in 1991-92 to 2.4% in 1996-97.
- Reading achievement increased at the high school level from 49.8 percentile points in 1992-93 to 53.8 percentile points in 1996-97 and mathematics grew from 54.2 to 58.2 during that same period.

Seattle

- Fourth grade mathematics scores on the *Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills* show large gains since 1994-95. That year the average mathematics percentile was 45. In 1996-97 it was 56; Language Arts percentile scores rose from 49 to 55; reading from 50 to 54.
- Five-year trend data show a 26 scale score increase on the verbal portion of the *SAT* and a 9-point



increase on the mathematics portion. 1996-97 averages are 519 for the verbal portion and 518 for the mathematics portion.

- The number of security incidents has decreased significantly from 3,348 in June 1995 to 2,260 in June 1997.

Toledo

- The percent of students passing the *Ohio Ninth Grade Proficiency Test* increased 7% in 1996-97 when compared to the previous year. The increases in mathematics and writing ranged from 7% to 19% respectively.

- The number of students suspended during the first semester of the 1997-98 school year decreased 24% compared to the same period a year ago.

- In response to questions in the annual high school graduate survey, 92% of all 1996 graduates reported they were attending school, employed or in the military.

Tucson

- For the 1996-97 school year there were 16 student expulsions compared to 43 in 1994-95.

- The annual dropout rate decreased to 8.6% from almost 11% in 1993-94.

City Schools Whose Voters Have Approved Bonds and Increased Operating Levies Since 1996

Minneapolis
Los Angeles
Charlotte-Mecklenberg
Columbus
Cleveland
Detroit
Oakland
San Antonio
and other cities

12

About the Council...

The Council of the Great City Schools is the only organization in the nation exclusively representing urban public schools and public school children. Composed of 49 large city school districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate for urban students through legislation, research and media relations. The organization also provides a network for school districts to share common problems, to exchange information and to address collectively new challenges as they emerge in order to deliver the best education for the nation's urban youth.

The 6.3 million students who attend schools within CGCS districts represent approximately 13% of the nation's K-12 public school enrollment and are from all socioeconomic backgrounds: 60% are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, 40% are English language learners, 10% are disabled, 45% are African-American, 30% are Hispanic and 24% are White.

Participating school districts are located in cities with populations over 250,000 or student enrollments over 35,000. School districts in the largest city of any state are also eligible for membership, regardless of size.

Council of the Great City Schools
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Suite 702
Washington, D.C. 20004

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